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FRIENDLY WORDS
TO
EDUCATED NATIVES.

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WHAT IS SAVING FAITH ?



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WHAT IS SAVING FAITH ?

You have often heard it said that men are saved by faith. You have read in the Gospels that he who believeth hath life eternal. Perhaps you have allowed yourself to entertain a prejudice against this way of obtaining the favour of God. It may have struck you, or you may have seen the thought expressed, that belief is an intellectual act independent of a man's volition, and one for which he is not to be blamed or praised. I trust you are not unwilling to look into this matter and see how far the statement is true that men are not responsible for unbelief. If you will suppose the case of a very kind and wise king, the true sovereign of the country, studying in all things the welfare of his subjects and giving them ex-

cellent laws, you would acknowledge that they who should rise up in rebellion against him, preferring their own will to his, must be regarded as the enemies of their country, for whom the punishment for high treason is justly reserved. Well, it is simply unbelief that actuates them. They have no confidence in him or his government; all the benefits conferred by him fail to impress them; they are determined that they will not serve him or honour him. The faith that is demanded in God is trust, confidence; and God became manifest in Christ's humanity in order that all men might see how trustworthy He is. Can a child do greater violence to the feelings of his father than by signifying his want of confidence?

Naaman was commander-in-chief of the forces of the King of Syria. The Syrians, in one of their inroads into the land of Israel, had carried off a young maiden who became servant to Naaman's wife. Through her Naaman learned that there was a prophet in Israel, at whose request God would heal even leprosy. He there-

Upon went in great state with many camel-loads of costly gifts, to propitiate the prophet. The prophet would none of his gifts, neither would he come out to greet him, but sent word to him to bathe in the river Jordan seven times. Naaman was very indignant at this, and replied that there were as good rivers in Syria as in Israel, and went away in a rage. But his servants soon took an opportunity to suggest to him that he had taken a great deal of trouble in coming so far, and that it would not cost him much to make trial of the measure prescribed. So he went to the Jordan, bathed therein seven times, and was completely restored. He had evidently formed some idea in his mind of the way in which Elisha would receive him, and of certain imposing ceremonies which he would go through, after which God would perhaps begin a work of restoration. Disappointed in this, and fancying that Elijah meant to represent the Jordan as having some healing virtue, he concluded that he had made a great mistake in repairing to

Samaria. But he listened to the suggestions of his servants; he gave God (so to speak) an opportunity of showing the truth of his own word; and the result was deliverance. God was pleased to save him in that way, and not in any other. What was that way but the way of faith? By faith he had received the testimony of the little maid concerning the prophet; in faith he had undertaken the journey; his faith had indeed received a shock when he got the prophet's instructions; but from this it recovered; it was faith alone that took him to the Jordan and made him bathe therein. It was not faith in the Jordan; he knew perfectly well that there was no curative power in that stream; it was faith in the word of God spoken by the servant of God.

When the Israelites, bitten by fiery serpents, were in danger of perishing in great numbers, God directed Moses to make a brazen serpent and elevate it on a pole; and then commanded all the bitten to look to it for healing. Now, it was their

faith in God's word that saved them, not any faith in the brazen serpent. They believed that God would heal them in this way; they looked in faith; they were healed. Reason might not have shown them that there was any virtue in the brass; but reason did show them that God would certainly fulfil his word. For them to have refused to exercise faith, would have been in the highest degree culpable; it would have been making God a liar and a deceiver. Let a merchant refuse to receive notes of a certain bank, and determine to have no bargains with those who offered such payments, he would thereby give the greatest stab to the credit of that bank, and by depreciating its shares, perhaps ruin many. If the bank should turn out to be as solvent as the Bank of England, we may fancy the storm of indignation that would gather round him for his insensate unbelief.

God does not demand faith in his Son, without giving the best of reasons for it. Faith and its opposite depend on the state of the heart, more than on the in-

telleet. The great difficulty is in the *unwillingness* to recognize as true God's claim upon our confidence.

As a matter of fact there is nothing that has such control of our lives as faith. It is not ordinarily faith in God, but faith in man. A person undertakes a voyage to a distant country; he traverses oceans and lands, and exposes himself to various dangers, in order to reach it; he has never seen that country, and has no personal knowledge of it; but he has heard of it, and there is not the slightest doubt in his mind that that very country will be found at the end of his journey, and that it will answer to the description he has had of it. All this is in faith. Faith is the reception of testimony. A man is dangerously ill; he calls an experienced physician, and submits, in all respects, to his treatment; he takes various drugs, about which he personally knows nothing; he recovers, and his recovery is due to the faith he had in the physician; for, without this faith, he never would have trusted himself to the doctor's guidance. A man

has only to consider the matter, and he will find that he is exercising faith all the day long. He eats his meals in faith; he has confidence in the cook, though perhaps he never exchanged five words with him; he takes his seat in a carriage in faith, though perhaps he does not look in the driver's face; he lies down to sleep, without examining the rafters of the roof over his head, to see if they are sound. Society could not exist without faith between man and man. Columbus embarked on his great expedition for the discovery of a new world in faith; his faith was gloriously rewarded.

Even in matters of religion, the majority of men have a great deal of faith, but it is faith wrongly bestowed. We have no right to yield our confidence to any one, without some good grounds for our confidence. You may not trust your life to a physician, without some evidence that he is a competent man. Faith does not exclude evidence; it demands it. You eat the food set before you, because you know that men are governed by their in-

terests, and you believe it is for the interest of the cook to give you wholesome food, and not to poison you. We commit a letter to the post in faith, but at the same time we have good *reason* to believe that the letter will be carried to its destination. Our confidence is rightly reposed in a person when we have *evidence* that he is trustworthy. Many men place themselves, in religious matters, at the direction of their priest or gooroo, without having first ascertained that the priest or gooroo is competent to direct them. We are bidden to 'prove all things. By their fruits ye shall know the true teacher and the false.

Jesus Christ, when on the earth, said, "If I do not the works of Him that sent me, believe me not." They that saw him, saw plainly that he did not seek his own glory, did not desire the honour that cometh from man, and was not governed by self-interest. All that looked at the matter without prejudice, found proof that the prophecies were fulfilled in him, and that he was sent of God to save man-

kind. The honest enquirer sees that
> Christ is altogether worthy of his confidence. Let him, then, have faith in him. This faith immediately establishes a *vinculum*, a bond of connection between Christ and the believer. The promises all become his, and, drawing nigh to God in the name of Christ, he finds that God receives him and blesses him. Especially, the great promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled; the Spirit comes to him to dwell with him, to strengthen him for the conflict of life, to reveal the love of God, to purify his heart, to make him a new creature. He is now a changed man, and is guided in all things by the will of God; but he is careful not to trust in these new and good works, for if he does, it will be a breach of faith, a rupture of the *vinculum*, a forfeiture of Christ. We stand by faith. All the way along we keep looking to Jesus; we live by the faith of the Son of God; we abide in him as the branch abides in the vine, and this is salvation.

The great hindrance to a true faith in

the true God, is the consciousness of our own past unfaithfulness. We have not been careful to do the will of God, even so far as we knew it, and we have not been anxious to know it better. Now, the salvation we need is one that will inspire us with confidence toward God, *notwithstanding our sense of guilt*. The salvation offered us in Christ exactly meets this need, seeing that the righteousness of Christ becomes ours when we believe on him, and we draw nigh to a holy God in confidence because of the satisfaction God has in the atoning work of his Son. But unless our nature be

> changed at the same time, and the dis-
 > position to sin be replaced by the disposi-
 > tion to do God's will, pardon would do
 > us little good. Of what avail that yes-
 > terday's sin be forgiven, if to-day I resume
 the fetters of sin? Salvation includes both pardon and a new nature. And both these are found in the salvation offered in Christ.

There is a certain harbour on the coast of America which it is very difficult to

enter when the wind blows from a certain direction ; formerly there was a pilot living in the place, who was the only man that could take a ship safely into the harbour, at such a time. A ship was seen one morning making for the harbour, and the pilot hastened out in his boat to meet her. But he found the captain unwilling to accept of his services. The captain had obtained a pilot at another port, and was trusting to him to take the vessel in. The pilot of the port assured him that he alone could safely take the vessel in, and begged of him to entrust the vessel to his care, if he did not wish to see it lost. The captain, however, had confidence in his own pilot, and would not receive him. The rejected pilot then moved off in his boat. After a little reflection, however, the captain concluded that he had made a mistake ; so he signalled to the true pilot, who returned, came on board, took charge of the vessel and guided her safely to her anchorage. Here we see that the captain, was imperilling his ship through misplaced confidence,

and that the thing which saved him and his ship and crew was an act of faith in a competent party, involving the complete surrender of the ship into the care of the pilot. This illustrates the way of salvation by Christ. The sinner, conscious of his danger, abandons all self-guidance and the guidance of the world, and commits himself and his destinies into the hands of Christ; not partially and temporarily, but fully and forever.

Men are disobedient because they have no faith. Faith would assure them that God's commands are for their good. They are the expression of his love. We know that if we do not follow them, we will lose greatly. In fact there can be no true obedience without faith.

Unbelief is the door of the heart closed against God. Faith is the open door, whereby the commerce of the soul with God becomes possible. Faith brings us

- > under the power of the divine character,
- > changing us into the similitude of God.
- > It is the condition by which we obtain
- > the mighty power of God within us, to

transform us and fill us with the knowledge of God's will and a sweet consent thereto. Without faith it is impossible to please God. We cannot even please man without faith in man. We resent nothing onrselfes so mnch as mistrnst. We should remark, however, that faith is of no valuc, except as it attaches itself to tho trnth. Conple with this the thought that the truth has no power upon the mind, except as it meets with faith.

“It is of faith, that it might be by grace.” Salvation is a free, unmerited gift of God to men, and faith is simply the heart's reception of it. If salvation were in any other way, the credit would belong to man, and this would be completely opposed to the testimony, both of Scripture and of our own conscience, as to man's sinfulness.

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